PERSMAP


JURY PRIJS
FILMFESTIVAL CANNES 2012
THE
ANGELS'
SHARE
FOUR FRIENDS. ONE MISSION. LOTS OF SPIRIT
EEN FILM VAN
KEN LOACH
SCREENPLAY BY PAUL LAVERTY

Inhoud

THE ANGELS' SHARE

Een film van Ken Loach

Paul Brannigan John Henshaw William Ruane Jasmin Rigging

Speelduur: 105 min. – Land : Engeland - Jaar: 2011 - Genre: Drama
Format: Scope - Dolby SR

A bittersweet comedy about a Glasgow boy locked in a family feud who just wants a way out. When Robbie sneaks into the maternity hospital to visit his young girlfriend Leonie and hold his newborn son Luke for the first time, he is overwhelmed. He swears that Luke will not lead the same stricken life he has led.

On community service Robbie meets Rhino, Albert and Mo for whom, like him, work is little more than a distant dream. Little did Robbie imagine that turning to drink might change their lives - not cheap fortified wine, but the best malt whiskies in the world. What will it be for Robbie? More violence and vendettas or a new future with 'Uisge Beatha,' the 'Water of Life'? Only the angels know...

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Distributie:	Cinéart

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CAST

Robbie	Paul Brannigan
Harry	John Henshaw
Thaddeus	Roger Allam
Albert	Gary Maitland
Mo	Jasmin Riggins
Rhino	William Ruane
Leonie	Siobhan Reilly
Rory McAllister	Charlie Maclean

CREW

Regisseur	Ken Loach
Producent	Rebecca O'Brien
Screenplay	Paul Laverty
Cinematografie	Robbie Ryan
Casting	Kahleen Crawford
Productieontwerp	Fergus Clegg
Art direction	Zoe Wright
Make-up	Kristyan Mallett
Production Management	Eimhear McMahon
Art department	Paul Lambie
	Andrew MacMillan
	Campbell Mitchell
	Tony Sheridan
Geluid	Ray Beckett
	Ben Brazier
	Robert Brazier
	Andrew Caller
	Sue Harding
	Ian Tapp
	Rowena Wilkinson
Kostuums	Dani Miller
Montage	Mike Andrews
Muziek	Steve Price

WRITER (PAUL LAVERTY)

Our previous film was a tragic story. With this one we wanted to explore not just another tone, but somehow to try and inhabit another register. From its first simmering it had the feel of a little fable; although the characters somehow feel familiar to us, I hope there is a sense of their life force and mischief that might make you care for them. At least in the imagination it was an attempt to be both realistic, but also a little magical; perhaps a fable of wasted talent, and what happens when we are given a chance in life.

Two central and simple situations came to mind we thought worth exploring. When anyone has their first child it is a stunning experience that changes your life forever. It automatically projects into the future, and raises both practical and existential questions of the most profound nature. Past, present and future somehow become different when you have another human being to care for. The second notion: we now live in a world where many young people in particular will not have a proper job in their lives. These two situations merge in the character of Robbie and offer tremendous dramatic potential.

Robbie has had a tragic past and after a chaotic childhood we imagined he had served time in Polmont Young Offenders Institution. Is he going to repeat with his own son what he'd lived with his father and his grandfather? Third generation unemployment is not unusual in many of our cities. He's really up against it as the father of his girlfriend considers him to be a "scumbag". It's a big step to look at yourself and say, 'Right, am I a loser or can I make something of my life, despite what I've lived through?' There's dramatic tension there, both with the world outside, but also inside his head. Not only does the world distrust him, and for good reason, but he is not sure if he has the strength to change himself - never mind what is around him.

He needs a break. That's where the character Harry appeared. He was somebody who had lived through tough circumstances himself, having lost his business and his family. I think we can forget how much an arbitrary piece of luck, of meeting the right person at the right time can change a life, especially if it is at a vulnerable moment. A little perception, experience and generosity of spirit can go a long way. You see it again and again: even in the preparation for this film I met older people working with youngsters who had a zest about them. Young people get it very hard in this country: they're too easily stereotyped as lazy, greedy, feckless. Harry's the type of man who sees the potential in people. Even as I was going round talking to many of the supervisors who were dealing with those doing community service orders, you saw those traits. Some of the supervisors, not an easy job, were authoritarian - and got nowhere with them. But then you saw others that were creative, thought laterally, who encouraged and made them laugh. It worked much better, for some. That brought the best out of people, especially for those whom you might guess had been more shouted at in their lives than ever listened to.

In the course of digging around before the film was made I had the good fortune to meet Paul (Brannigan) who ended up playing the main character, Robbie. Kenny MacAskill, an old friend with whom I did my legal apprenticeships nearly 30 years ago, suggested I meet a senior police officer who was running the Violence Reduction Unit in Strathclyde, a man called John Carnochan. John had great experience and had many fascinating insights that were far from the stereotype. As part of their work with gangs in Glasgow they'd looked at flashpoints and the most dangerous moments of the week, especially Friday night, when far too often cheap alcohol, adrenalin and not much to do combine in the worst manner.
So John and his colleagues ended up collaborating with people who ran football matches on a Friday night throughout the city.

Better to be playing each other than fighting each other. I asked John to put me in contact with anybody who was working on that scheme and one of the many fascinating characters I met was Paul.

He was a very bright lad, thoughtful. He'd lived through many tough experiences himself, but there was a steadiness to him. He got a bunch of the lads together from the group he was running, and it was their chance to take the piss with a filmmaker. We chatted for about two hours. It was chaotic, funny; Paul managed the boys very well. He just had a natural understated presence, and you could sense he was held with respect.

So I met him several times more, made a mental note and mentioned him to Ken. When we came to do the casting I was really keen that Paul should come along, but as it turned out that proved slightly more complicated than we imagined and no doubt he might tell the tale in his own words.

When he finally came along and did the first improvisation you could sense he had something special and as we did more and more you could see his confidence grow. He had natural charisma, a great face, and a sense of lived experience underneath: a sense of vulnerability, which was really important for the character. I will always respect how Ken is prepared to take a gamble and cast someone with no acting experience at the heart of a film. He did it with Kes, with Sweet Sixteen and now again. It takes nerve but I think Paul did us proud. There is almost a fable like quality to how Paul got the part too.

The whisky world is full of intriguing contradictions, which is always attractive. Ever since I heard of a flock of geese guarding a whisky warehouse it has struck me there must be some comic potential in there. I blame my brother in law Angus McConnel for introducing me to the wonderful world of malts, from Bladnoch in the South to Old Pulteney in the North, and many hangovers in between. At one level it is scientific, empirical and with great craftmanship. But at another there is almost a magical quality, from the specific shape of the still, to the particular barrel once steeped perhaps in Spanish sherry in a particular spot in a dunnage ware-house producing a unique whisky. There is something exotic about those thousands of barrels maturing for years in the dark, intermittently tested by the ware house man like some magician of old, (not the best place to spend hours shooting, ask the crew,) and those stunning distilleries by mountains, streams or facing the wild Atlantic. The Angels' Share is a delightful notion: that precious per cent that drifts off by itself to escape homo sapiens and the tax man. The poetic and the bullshit rub up against one another, the mythical, the marketing, the professionalism, the phoney, the snobbery, and of course the sheer genuine pleasure of it all, make for a wonderful concoction with many levels. I remember the first time I heard an old man in a scruffy pub call for "a wee low flyer," a nip of Grouse, dwarfed by his half pint, and the smile on his face. At the other extreme a principal dealer in London told me of the Arab Prince who bought a bottle of whisky for £32,000 in an hotel in Kent and polished it off with his friends, followed by two more bottles exceeding twenty grand. Charlie Mclean, a genuine whisky expert, and the most generous of enthusiasts, introduced me to the complexity of our own senses, and what a wonderful organ the humble nose is. Likewise the palate. Nosing and tasting whisky will never be the same. And yet despite whisky's multimillion pound international projection, its association with our cultural identity, it amazed me how many young Scots had never tasted our national drink. But that was less surprising than many of the young people I met serving court orders who had never enjoyed countryside, mountains and the glorious spots where whisky is made. Strange, both whisky and beauty, on our doorstep, but out of reach.

There are thousands of Robbies and Rhinos out there, and I like the idea they can learn to enjoy the fine things in life more than an Arab Prince, given the chance.

DIRECTOR (KEN LOACH)

Why this story?
Late last year, the number of unemployed young people in Britain reached over a million for the first time. We wanted to tell a story about this generation of young people, a lot of whom face an empty future. They can be pretty sure that they won't get a job, a permanent job, a secure job. Just what effect does that have on people and how do they see themselves?

You've made several films in Glasgow before. Why did you choose to set a film there again?
There are other cities like Liverpool and Newcastle or Manchester, or probably parts of the Midlands where you could find the same stories, but Paul's from the west coast so that's his idiom and that's where he writes best. And Glasgow's such a powerful location that it seemed the right place to set it - powerful in the culture of people there, in the sense of humour, the attitudes that people have to life, and the history that's produced there. It's a very collective, not an individualist culture, and yet people have as hard a time there as anywhere you could imagine.

Why a comedy?
Well just to be contradictory really. You always want to take an unexpected path. We'd done a film like Sweet Sixteen, which was about lads, younger than these, but placed in an equally impossible situation, and that did end in tragedy. But the same characters will have incidents in their lives which are sometimes comic, and other times not. So we just thought we would pick one of the comic moments.

Is the process of making a comedy any different to making a serious piece?
No, the process is the same really, and I suppose the basic aesthetic is the same. Really, the comedy is usually the interaction of people, and the cracks they make, or the misunderstandings, or the time it takes for something to sink in… it's not slap-stick. In a way it's a story with a few smiles in it rather than a comedy from start to finish – it certainly isn't that, because there are one or two quite dark moments in it. So the process is the same: it's about trying to release, or to enable people to go through the experiences, and if it's funny as it unfolds, well it's funny. If it's sharp or harsh then it should be that, and if it's unsympathetic then it's got to be that. The aim is just to have truthful interactions between people, and set them in a realistic framework. Then, if in real life they would make you smile, they make you smile; if in real life they'd make you cry, they make you cry, or make you angry or whatever.

Where did you start with The Angels' Share?
The biggest issue is always is what's in the script and who are the characters. Then it's casting. We were looking for quite a long time and saw a lot of people for Robbie. It's just a gradual process of elimination. A lot of people are good but they're not good in exactly the way you want. The locations were just a question of spadework, so we saw a lot of distilleries - which was no hardship!

Describe Robbie
He's had a very harsh childhood, he's been involved in violence, he's served quite a long prison sentence in a young offenders' institution, and now he's really trying to get his life on track. He's bright and he's thoughtful, and he's met this girl who he is very fond of. They're having a child together. But from her parents' point of view, it's a disastrous relationship because all they see is a young thug and a young criminal, and the girl's father knows that world very well. He owns clubs, he's made a lot of money, he's moved to a better suburb, but he knows he's from the same mean streets that Robbie's from, so he knows that this lad has practically no chance of making a life for himself. Therefore, he's practically no chance of making a life for his daughter and their child either, so in the interests of his daughter he's going to use the methods of the street to keep them apart.

You can have some sympathy for him, not with his tactics, but with the dilemma. If you've got a daughter and she's up with somebody who's probably involved in drugs, certainly involved in violence, no job, no way out - you know you'd be worried. Robbie's at that point where he's just going to struggle to be a father and to be a parent, to make some kind of living to support his family, which he sees no way of doing at the outset, and just sees no way out. Obviously the academic process passed him by because he was just being a teenage criminal from a world where that was the norm. So how do you get out of it? He says he's determined, but when that's your world and that's your perspective, it's very difficult to get out.

How do you decide when to cast established performers like Roger Allam in a role like Thaddeus?
It wasn't the fact that Roger was more established, it's just that I knew him and I knew he has a way of appearing sometimes; a way of appearing where you know he's up to something, but you don't know quite what. We met quite a lot of people as well, but nobody had that air that made you think there's something suspicious going on here but I'm not clever enough to work out what it is. And with a sense of humour as well. There's villainy, but it's villainy that makes you smile, and he has that absolutely, without having to articulate it.

What about the rest of the cast?
They're all fantastic. It was very good to work with William [Ruane] again - it's always good to have somebody in the cast who you can rely on. You know that you can often direct the others through that one person. I'd give William a note and he's professional enough to be able to include that in what he's doing. I know that'll draw a particular response from the others, without them being aware that they're being directed. Gary [Maitland], I don't think he's been doing any acting for a little while, but he's been in two of our films before, and he's just very… well he makes us smile. He has the air of living in parallel universe that operates with different laws to the rest of us. But also he has a very benign, good-humoured presence, and when disasters befall him you do feel for him as well. Jasmin [Riggins] was a delight: nice girl, very funny, but quite astringent and a good sharp presence.

The part we looked a long time for was finding a girl who would be Robbie's partner, Leonie. We thought it would be the easiest part but actually it turned out almost to be the hardest, because pitching the social level was very important. Because her father has made money they've moved out, so she's not mixing with the same group as Robbie and the others, and her father's tried to give her more of a middle class background. But nevertheless she's close enough to Robbie's world to understand it. Finding someone who would just seem to fit was quite a challenge. There are different elements to balance: it can't be somebody posh, it can't be somebody too much from the street, but it should be someone that Robbie would feel was a real catch. We looked for a long time and Siobhan [Reilly] was someone we kept coming back to. She was lovely really, a smashing girl.

I should also say something about Charlie Maclean. Paul had written this character Rory and he'd met Charlie as a whisky expert so obviously Charlie was in his thoughts. He was going to be an advisor, and Paul said to me, 'You ought to meet him.' Once we'd met him obviously he could just do it - it was inevitable that he would be in the film really. If somebody acted a character like that you'd get all the outward appearances of Charlie but it would be hard to have the knowledge and the actual concern, or the enjoyment of whisky that he obviously has.

How does whisky work as a metaphor in this film?
The moment you start talking about the whisky as a metaphor I'll get into pretentious areas! I think we've got to let the audience see that. The comparison is with Kes. In that film the bird, obviously, is the free spirit that the boy can never be, but we never talked about the metaphor at the time. The audience just has a sense of it.

How was the shoot?
There was an initial hiccup: I fell over. So there was a short delay. That was just an irritation. Apart from that the production team is so astute that they by and large troubleshoot the problems before we get to them. They are like a fine orchestra, with David Gilchrist, the first AD, leading the violins. They would probably manage without a conductor.

Is it more fun filming a comedy?
It's always just hard work really. You wake up in the morning in a cold sweat thinking, 'Am I going to get through the day? Are we going to get it done,' so I just find it's too much pressure for it to be fun. I mean there are funny things that happen in the course of the day invariably but the overriding impression in the morning is just the work you've got to get through and the slight air of panic that you aren't going to make it. Part of the work of directing is hiding your internal panic, because you can't let it communicate.

Do you still have that after so many films?
Every day throughout the day, yes. Even days that seem quite easy there's still a sense of a mountain you've got to climb, and it doesn't seem to get any easier. Some things get easier in that you know whatever short cuts there are to take, how you can manage it, but that's cancelled by just the physical effort of doing it. You've got to put energy into it; you can never be on the back foot, because if you are then everybody knows that and the energy levels sag. If the energy levels sag the performances will - you've got to generate the adrenalin for them to fire off. You can't have a totally placid set and expect people to give strong performances. And it's not fair to leave it to the performers: you can't just sit back and look at a monitor and say, 'Okay, off you go, do it.' They've got to have a sense of constructive pressure and constructive tension, and a constructive energy between people, because then they'll spark off each other. The director's got to generate that. It's all about what is going to be in front of the camera, what's in their eyes, what goes between them. So you've got to pace the little surges of energy and let there be a down period when you're setting up or moving or whatever and then wind it up again. It can be silly things like you've got to run about sometimes, just run about, and dash from them to the camera and around, and if somebody is showing a bit of energy, then it's contagious. It's why I think monitors are the death because when a director retreats behind a monitor, you're cutting yourself off instead of communicating. You're saying, 'Let somebody else do it.'

What did you know about whisky before this film?
Not a lot, and I don't know much now, except that I do know you have to sniff it more than taste it, which I like. The idea of really enjoying the nuances of a drink, yes there is something in that: that it isn't just something to throw down your neck and get obliterated, it's something to savour.

What do you hope the audience will take out of this film?
I hope they'll enjoy meeting the folks in it, particularly the young people who are either referred to as 'petty criminals' or 'benefit claimants' or whatever, and just see that they are rounded, humorous, proper, real people; and that for every one of that million unemployed statistic, there are a million kids who are facing a fairly hopeless future - and here's four of them. Aren't they interesting to meet and aren't they complex and valuable, worth something really? I hope they'll see that as well as enjoying the tale.

How does The Angels' Share sit among your previous work about young people?
The kids in previous films have had 'projects', like these four have the project of trying to raise money through their talent for nosing whisky. The lad in Sweet Sixteen had to raise money for a caravan for his mum. Billy Casper in Kes had to train the bird. They all show that idea of people who are generally disregarded having projects which they achieve or don't achieve, and enthusiasms and commitment and a talent which you don't know about.

I suppose it's the old image of flowers on the bombsite: in the most unlikely surroundings extraordinary things will happen. Young People are cast adrift into a world that, by and large, has no time for them. I wouldn’t say there's nothing that a job wouldn’t solve, but a proper secure craft, or skill, or job would solve most of the problems that these kids face, and that most people face. Because we are defined by our work aren’t we? Whether you’re a craftsman in the building trade, a joiner, or plasterer or whatever, that's your identity and that's your sense of self. Well, now a lot of people don’t have that. They are just what they're told they are which is 'benefit claimants' and constantly scrutinised in case they're cheating. What sense of self-worth can you have in that situation?

PRODUCER (REBECCA O'BRIEN)

We first talked about this film in some depth when we had an away day. I should point out that the Sixteen Films 'away day' was just Paul and Ken and I having a nice walk around Bath. The three of us got together and Paul was brimming with the characters that he'd thought of for this.

He wanted to go back to the world of My Name is Joe, Sweet Sixteen and Ae Fond Kiss – back to those people, to that world that he knows well. He wanted to take today's issues like youth unemployment and visit it within his favourite context. Rather than be didactic and bossy he's come up with a lovely little parable of the Angels' Share – which tells you a possible way of making things better somehow. It doesn't take a lot to improve things and I think that's what Paul's suggesting with the script.

Finance
We'd had such a good time with our French partners - Pascal Caucheteux from Why Not Productions and Vincent Maraval from Wild Bunch - on Looking For Eric that we kept working with them on Route Irish. And luckily for us we didn't put them off with that so they said, 'We'll do it again.' Those two companies have brought us a French co-production and a very good sales team. So it's very much the same financing structure as we did on Looking For Eric: we're still operating in the Cantona mode. It's all thanks to Eric – which is why Canto Bros are credited on the film.

We've put together a similar funding pattern as we've had in the past. That means a co-production with Italy, Belgium, UK and France, with pre-sales to Spain and France and the UK and equity support from the BFI, France 2 and Studio Canal.
It's the usual patchwork quilt.

A lot of the money for our films comes from France. But that is out best territory so it makes economic sense for it to come from the people who appreciate our films most. For The Angels' Share the BFI came on board with a nice healthy investment. That really helped given we don't have a British broadcaster at this stage. We've got a strong UK pre-sale with Entertainment One, who also distribute the Twilight films. I have told them that I expect a premiere of similar magnitude to Breaking Dawn for The Angels' Share… Maybe we'll all turn out in tartan.

But they also did a very good job on NEDS last year which demonstrated how they could make what might normally be construed as a niche, arthouse film work - and work in Scotland in particular, where we hope The Angels' Share will find an audience.

Our funding partners are very generous now – they do recognise that we are grown up enough to make the films ourselves, so they don't interfere in the creative process. I must give the BFI the credit as well for really allowing us to be at arm's length. In the past when we've had equity funding people are desperate to get involved but with Ken's experience it doesn't work – we'll just make the film we were going to make and that's the way we work. You know: old dog, new tricks.

To be frank I think the less interference the better, with any filmmaker. You need to let them show their mettle, otherwise they just become a servicing engineer. Filmmakers need to be able to have the freedom to have ideas, so they can develop. Fortunately we do have that freedom but it shouldn't just be for us.

The Shoot

On day one of the shoot, a big day, Ken was very helpfully taking his dinner plate back to the caterers when he tripped on a step and bashed his head. It was a serious tumble, and we had to take a hiatus of three weeks. As we only take six weeks to shoot that was a major hiccup. We had to put people on hold and ask cast and crew to be available for another three weeks. But mercifully everybody was up for it – there were no problems because everybody was dying to do it.

For the rest of the shoot, well – when you're making comedy it's always more fun. The weather in Scotland isn't always perfect. And it certainly wasn't always perfect: I remember we were filming up in a cemetery that overlooked Glasgow. It was a beautiful place but the weather was absolutely freezing – this was the middle of June and I was in a hat and gloves on top of a hill.

It was wonderful to go out beyond Glasgow, go to Edinburgh and the Highlands for filming. When you get out of an urban context and you end up filming in beautiful places in the middle of nowhere people are so happy to see you, to have a film happen. In those situations it's such a pleasure to make a film.

Michael Higson, our location manager, was working on the production for nine months, looking at distilleries. Fortunately he likes whisky. All the distilleries we worked at were so accommodating and helpful. Balblair is the setting for the last part of the film, the auction, Glengoyne is the exterior of the first distillery the group visits, and Deanston provides the interior. At Deanston there was a big storm a couple of nights before we were shooting there and they had a massive power cut. Their whole operation went down. They were just desperate to get it up and running so they could do it properly for us. They weren't so worried about their product!

For the auction we wanted something that was remote and looked remote, so that you could believe there's only one road south. We were also keen to have the pagoda roofs – we wanted it to be a picturesque setting representing all that is lovely about Scotland. It's like a dream location, a fantasy world, something one would only aspire to. So Michael looked at a lot of places and Balblair had that. I remember seeing its publicity photo. I felt, 'Yes, that's the one.' It's an hour's drive north of Inverness and there isn't a lot more beyond it: to the west of Balblair it's just mountains. But because it's on the east coast it doesn't have the fierceness of the highlands, and the colours are lovely.

The three distilleries we choose are all independently run, a bit like independent film production companies, and there were lots of parallels in the way they work – so they recognised themselves in us. At Balblair, we discovered, their best market is France. We were a marriage made in heaven.

We had incredible support from lots of other whisky companies as well who gave us bottles to use in the film. We haven't been able to show nearly enough of their names so I apologise to them. They can at least know that the whisky has all gone to good causes. A bottle each to all of the cast and crew!

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY (ROBBIE RYAN)

How did you first become involved?
I was cycling down the canal and I got a phonecall from my London agent saying would I like to meet Ken Loach the next day. I met Rebecca and Ken at their offices and we had a nice chat. Twenty minutes later Rebecca rang and said do you want the job? I had to say yes. It was quite a whirlwind beginning.

What did you like about the script?
It's very well written. Paul Laverty is an amazing writer. It's a very different type of script to normal as it's not done in a typical style – because Ken and Paul work together all the time they've got a shorthand of how the scripts are so there are a lot less scenes in the film than in most scripts which I found quite intriguing. It's much more economical storytelling, made to be achievable in a small amount of time. Ken likes to work quickly. Paul's scripts enable him to do that. Most of all though, it was a really good read. There are great characters in the film. I love Scottish humour anyway. I'm a massive fan of films produced in Scotland because of the characters that come out of there. They're just crazy people. Reading the script I really wanted to help visualise those people because they're mental you know?

What were your initial thoughts on how you wanted the film to look?
I know Ken's work from years back. I knew that he would have a certain approach and that's what we talked about in the meeting – how he would approach a scene and the whole process of how he works. In a way I felt that I would follow that style a bit. He has a way of working that you fit into, not so much him fitting in to my way of working. It's been great to see a different style of filmmaking: Ken's approach is different to most filmmakers.

Was that a challenge?
It was a complete change. It was a different kind of film to the kind I would normally do. But to work with somebody like Ken is to learn a whole new process and I wanted to try that out, try a change of pace.

What was different?
Ken's photography is not a million miles away from mine. We're both really observational, but his observation is more from a distance whereas mine is as if I'm with the person. Walking and talking with them – that's the kind of camerawork I am maybe more known for. Ken's no different in as far as the observing and the details, it's just the camera is in a different place. He likes to be further away from the action, not to invade the space of the people in the film. The camera style I've become known for is much more as another character in the film.

Is the Scottish landscape a major part of the film?
Not really. Because you're following the story. That's a little bit of a rule that Ken has that cuts straight to the core of what he wants: he places people in among certain scenarios and it's really about how they react. You're concentrating on them and not so much on the location around them. Obviously it's a beautiful place: that goes without saying. But I think Ken's very focussed on the people in the piece, not so much the place.

What struck you about Ken Loach's directing?
Ken thinks about getting what he needs. If he gets it quickly and he's happy he'll move on. If he thinks it takes a bit more time to get it he'll keep going until he gets it. And sometimes he's looking for accidents that might happen that he can capitalise on – he loves that. He just wants to open up the freedom to see what happens.

That goes for everything in the way he produces it. The camera side of things isn't really to the fore whereas on some films I've done the visuals are very strong in order to tell the story. Ken doesn't want to draw too much attention to the visual style. He just wants to have you forget about it so you can really focus on what's happening with the story.

Most of the time he uses one camera because he loves being beside the camera. He gets a bit concerned if the other camera's over there and he can't see what it's doing. He likes standing beside the camera: he'd be telling me, 'try this, try that.' And I should add that that's great - nowadays digital filmmaking makes everybody sit in tents with black shades around them. Ken comes from a school of filmmaking where the director should be by the camera. Now, with digital, people can be directing from a hotel 300 miles away. That makes such a difference in terms of getting a performance. Whether the person in front of a camera is an actor or not an actor, they need to be told where to go and what to do by somebody. Is it going to be the cameraman or the director? I think it should be the director. Any time I've worked with directors who are close to the action and the camera there's a great energy about that. That's lost if you've got a person in another room.

What was the technical set-up on The Angels' Share?
Ken shoots on film, he edits on film – he's one of the few directors that do – and he loves that process. We used 35mm and we used Kodak stock, Arri cameras and prime lenses so very simple really. For this particular film it was a comfortable place to work from: you know what you get, in terms of the look of it. From my point of view I like shooting on film. But it's an aesthetic choice really now. I can only fight as much as I can to say I prefer 35mm because technically I can't say digital is worse. But I definitely think I prefer the look of 35mm because of what the chemical process does to an image, as opposed to a digital process. That's personal preference – and I don't know how much longer I can hold out. In the low budget world where I come from you can't really fight the cost of digital versus 35mm. I think people like Steven Spielberg and Ken Loach will continue making films on film because that's where they've made their reputation. It's going to be a cause celebre for people to try and fight and save it.

PRODUCTION DESIGNER (FERGUS CLEGG)

The original plan was to film on Islay because that was where it was originally scripted. We went there and looked at all the distilleries but logistically it was too much – so within about two weeks of my starting on the film we realised it wasn't going to be Islay. And then we had to spend the next two weeks rushing around doing recces of mainland distilleries. Charlie Maclean was really helpful with locations and we also asked him to say whenever something wasn't right in the whisky realm.

The difficulty was you have this idealised view of how a distillery should be and you look at them and think, 'Aww, that's so quaint.' Then you get there and the mechanics aren't right. A lot of them have had the heart ripped out of them. Some of them are highly mechanised – at the big distillers they tend to industrialise the process. So you see a quite interesting building on the outside but get inside and it's a man in a glass room pushing buttons. That's not very romantic.

The process of making whisky is magical – how you turn this grain in to this very sought after drink. There's an amazing transformation that happens and the whisky industry trades on this. Originally Paul had written the script and it had a lot of those elements in it. We found that some of them were quite rare. The malting floors, for example, no longer exist by and large: it's all done somewhere else and then brought to the distillers. So elements of that heritage and tradition had already disappeared. We were looking for a mix of what's best visually and what's part of the process. It was almost impossible to find that in one place.

We started trying to find somewhere near Glasgow and then we radiated out further and further. We found Balblair distillery, where the climax of the film takes place, quite late on – it's almost as far north as you can go. It's fantastic, set in good countryside and with very, very helpful people.

When it came to the city setting, Ken's always keen to avoid the stereotypical approach. Harry's flat was difficult. He was someone who'd obviously had a major change in his life. His marriage had broken up, he'd lost his business and his livelihood and was starting afresh in a new town and a new place. But he's obviously a guy with a commitment to what he was doing in terms of helping turn these people's lives around. So we wanted somewhere that didn't look too affluent. The problem with shooting in these locations is the practicality of fitting a film unit in. The rooms have to be a certain size and the quality of the light is very important to Ken. He wants to use as much ambient light as possible so you look for large windows and a layout that works in terms of camera positions and shots through.

We looked at countless flats for Harry, but the good thing about Glasgow is a lot of those types of houses belong to Housing Associations so there is a believability in that. Although they look very grand they do actually house people from the right social group. To people from the south they might look disproportionately large and ornate but because of Glasgow's history and the tenement life style they're actually correct.

For Robbie's flat it was a kind of squat type thing we were looking for and the one we found was in the Possilpark area. It has an amazing view over Glasgow and all these 1930s buildings. The area had such a bad reputation they're levelling it and starting again. So the property was almost entirely empty. It was supposed to be Robbie's friend's flat and Robbie has a room there. It was very basic, very pared down, no decoration, just scraps of carpet on the floor. Paul Brannigan, who plays Robbie, has been homeless so he knows it for real and he gave us a very clear brief. He came in one day and we said what would you have in your room. He said, 'nothing.' There'd be a mattress, a pillow, a sheet over the window, and a black bag with some clothes in. The odd thing was he said he had a bit of cardboard under the bed he would use as an ironing board on the floor.

So there was still that idea of caring for your appearance. It's probably the last thing you can control. Oh, and he said he'd had a weapon in the corner, a bit of metal or a machete, in case someone broke in.

CAST

Paul Brannigan
Robbie

I had a job at a community centre when I first met Paul Laverty, the writer. I was working alongside Strathclyde Police on a project called the Community Initiative to Reduce Violence. Paul had heard about my past and my life story, but by that point a lot of people had because I'd been out there, been to youth centres, schools, doing football coaching.

The story I told them all was about growing up in Barrowfield in Glasgow: what I'd learned in my life about how drugs and alcohol can affect people, and the real facts about what it's like in prison. What it's like when you think you're in a gang and you think they're your friends and they say 'I'll back you up'. And they don't. How you can stay out of trouble through sport, through family. I tell them how I've got a wee boy now and how he's the most important thing that's happened to me.

Paul Laverty came and spoke to me and asked me to set up a meeting with myself and some boys that I'd been working with. We did that and then he asked me to go down and speak to Ken. But by this time I'd lost my job at the community centre. The way I'd lost that job was pretty bad. I felt as if I'd been stabbed in the back. I was gutted.

So when Paul asked me to go down and speak to Ken I felt what's the point? I'm fed up telling my story and not getting anywhere. So I didn't go. Twice.

Then Paul phoned and basically gave me a kick up the backside. He said get your arse down here: this is a chance for you. Maybe not a big part but something. Because I had a wee boy and I was tired and it was just after Christmas I was feeling really, really low. 'Scuse my language but I basically went fuck it: at the time I was thinking if I get anything from this I can pay off one of my loans I took out for Christmas. So I went down and I just gave it everything I could possibly give.

I've never had any training as an actor so I just decided to go with my instinct, my feelings. Having so much experience through my life in every kind of situation you could possibly think of: that helped me. I tried to think of things in my past and use them – but not let it affect me in a way that I'm going to get obviously upset.

To be honest with you I realised that Ken was just a down to earth guy. He knows what he wants but he also gives you a chance to express your own opinions and feelings. As time went on through all the castings I just became myself – more confident and comfortable.

When I got the part I was more worried about meeting the crew and the rest of the cast, because of my background. To go into that environment not knowing what these people think of you is quite daunting. But within the space of about an hour I realised that they were the same as me - they just want to get on with the work, see everybody as equal. They've been so good to be – made me feel really comfortable.

Robbie has a real talent for whisky and so I've had a few tastings and I've picked up bits and bobs, especially about the smelling and the tasting. They gave me ten miniatures to take home for homework, some books and a notebook. I thought I was being daft. I was smelling and it smelt like wet dog, leather, sea weed, salt, peanuts – all different things. Then I would refer to the book and nine times out of ten some of the things I'd written were right. So I started to take a wee interest. It was like a game. Now every time I'm in the pub I give it a go.

All in all it's worked out absolutely brilliantly for me. Usually any job I've been in – and in the last four years I've worked four or five different jobs - every day has been a struggle in the morning. With this I'm buzzing from the moment I get up.

It's been like therapy in a way. You think about the issues in the film and it reminds you how things were and what you've got now. It keeps your feet on the ground. For me that's the most important thing that could happen. If I get nothing out of this, fair enough. Just as long as I keep my feet on the ground, I'll be fine.

John Henshaw
Harry

I play Harry who's one of the supervisors on the community service that Robbie, Mo, Albert and Rhino are doing. He sort of gets on with them, sees something in them, so he decides to take them on a little day trip because a lot of them have never been out of Glasgow before. In this he incorporates a visit to a distillery and then the story goes from there.

Harry loves the old malt whisky and so he sets up this visit so they can appreciate a bit of their culture. Not to get them drinking, mind, but just to show you can have a nice civilised drop of whisky rather than getting out of your head on Stella or what have you. He wouldn't preach or try to educate them in that way - he just wants to show them another way.

We don't really know that much about Harry's background. He's divorced and he lives on his own. He's got a daughter but he's not seen his family for a bit. We just know that he's relocated from Manchester, he's up in Glasgow and he lives and works alone. He takes the kids to his heart. To say they're his family is a bit strong but they're all he's got really.

Why does he want to help them?
He forms a bond with Robbie because he's got something about him. I suppose he sees the way the girlfriend's father has treated Robbie and he forms an attachment. He finds the whole gang funny - they're good kids. And he sees the good in them, considering where they are and what they've done. He just thinks they need to see a bit more of life, get out there, see what they can do. That's why he takes them for a day out on his own time. But then he becomes involved with Robbie's troubles to a certain extent when Leonie has the baby and Harry takes him to the hospital. He feels a little bit worried, because he knows that having a baby can be the start of a different life for Robbie - as long as Leonie's dad leaves him alone he can make a bit of a future for himself.

Is Harry a comic character?
Not specifically, but he does have that working class humour if you like; the whole gang do. Glasgow is very much like Manchester, where I'm from. I always feel a great affinity with Glasgow and Glaswegians say the same. It's that dry, down to earth sense of humour they have. It's the way they deal with things. No matter where they are the first thing they want to do is come up with a line about it. They're not necessarily telling jokes or being funny, it's just the way they are. Likewise, this film doesn't go out of its way to be a comedy, it's just the spirit of the people that are in it I suppose – no pun intended.

What struck you about the script?
Harry's looking after these kids who are doing community service for trifling things really. But they're not bad kids - all of them are likeable. I went out for a day with a community service team in Glasgow. We spent the morning outside a school scraping the railings and cleaning them off. They were good kids too. But they're trapped in an environment – Glasgow's a fantastic place but like

anywhere else, some kids can't see the wood for the trees, they don't get the opportunity. Society's not geared that way now to get them on the ladder for employment – there are no apprenticeships or things like that. So what are the kids to do? Sometimes you just get took up the wrong path.

How does working with untrained actors compare to trained actors?
Well I'm not a trained actor so it depends on your definition of that! If you've got a script then it's a different story altogether but on Ken's films you don't get a full script so it's more about people thinking on their feet. A lot of trained actors don't like improvisation. Some are brilliant at it, some are not. Because of the really stringent casting process that Ken goes through he knows the people he's got before he starts. That's interesting when, for example, you say something to another cast member and you don't know what's coming back. So you react to it. It just creates a moment. People watching it sense that. That's the joy of it.

Your character is a whisky aficionado. Were you beforehand? Are you now?
I'm a real ale man, as you can probably tell from my physique. I didn't drink malt whisky, so I needed to get in to it for the part. I went to meet Charlie Maclean in Edinburgh who was fascinating, a really nice guy - he's the god of whisky and a character to boot. We spent the afternoon going through different whiskies from all sorts, teaching me the difference between the highlands and the lowlands, the peaty ones and stuff like that. Then we went to a couple of distilleries, and the science of it – the different types of whisky, smelling it, the legs - it was a real education for me. Since then I've got a couple of nice malts in the house and I've come to like it.

Roger Allam
Thaddeus

How did you come to be cast?
I'd worked with Ken and Rebecca before a few years back on The Wind That Shakes The Barley and they got in contact. No one knows what the full script is except them and they keep it secret but I was given the gist of who Thaddeus was, and I was free and delighted to do it.

Describe Thaddeus
He is a whisky dealer working somewhere in the grey area of criminality really. He deals in very, very expensive whisky for very rich collectors and clients who have spare millions hanging about and want to spend it. He provides them with rare things. I imagine he comes from a posh background but he isn't especially rich himself.

What is Thaddeus's relationship with Robbie?
He first meets Robbie at this tasting in Edinburgh and he spots someone who's got a very good nose. Robbie can judge whisky and he's got an instinct and knowledge beyond his years. One of the things about Thaddeus is that he's essentially democratic. He doesn't care about people's class, background or where they come from or who they are – I mean when it comes to his clients he's probably dealing with the Russian mafia for God's sake! So if someone's got a skill or a talent and he sees a spark in them, which he does with Robbie, he's perfectly prepared to use it. Whatever it takes to get the whisky he's after.

Does working without a complete script require a change of style?
You don't need to know everything to be able to play a scene. You just need enough to go on. If I think about who I, Roger Allam, am, everything I can remember I can recall - but I don't remember it all the time. You don't carry the knowledge of who you are around with you all the time, at the forefront of your consciousness. It's like that in acting – you just need to have an idea of the type of person you are playing. The advantage to Ken's method is you can get stuff made with a greater amount of freedom. In terms of acting, the great John Gielgud said that,

‘Style is knowing what play you are in’. As an actor you work within the guidelines and perimeters laid down by the people that you’re working with.

How was filming in Scotland?
I’ve been very lucky. Most of the days I did were absolutely glorious. So I experienced none of the hardship that all of the rest did, in terms of the weather, which I gather was Antarctic at times. I hadn't filmed in that particular bit of Scotland before but when I was a child my parents used to bring the family on walking holidays to the highlands, and I’ve filmed in Scotland several times – The Queen was shot around various places in the highlands and the lowlands, standing in for Balmoral. So yes, I know it and it was lovely to be up there.

This is your second time working with Ken Loach. How does it compare to other productions?
It’s hugely enjoyable, because it’s relaxed and it tends not to be overshot. If you shoot things from loads of different angles with loads of different lenses you can make a magnificent film, but in terms of acting the task then is to try to keep it fresh for every take. That can become very wearisome. Whereas on something like this you tend to do less of that and things therefore are fresher and more immediate. It’s not casual – though it feels like that in a way. I suppose it’s because he’s shooting in a way that is more like how the human eye sees. Rather than suddenly going in to a dramatic close-up or shooting from a very arty angle, it’s more like how you would see it as a human being.

As an actor with plenty of experience how do you find working with actors with no experience?
Well I do remember that on The Wind That Shakes The Barley there was a particular gag in a scene that a very, very sweet old man playing this part couldn’t do – because he didn’t have the technical facility to do it. So it’s swings and roundabouts. While you gain in terms of a freshness and looseness you can sometimes have to cut your losses. I guess also that young people, because there’s an awful lot of reality television, they're more used to the notion of being filmed. When I first made a film, when I came from the theatre the whole process of being filmed was very strange. Being in the theatre seemed much more real to me. Whereas for youngsters now they're much more at home in the business of there being a camera watching what you’re doing.

What was your whisky knowledge before this film?
I used to drink whisky but what I discovered over many years was that it didn't go terribly well with red wine. And I have rediscovered that in the course of making this film! As I say, I used to drink whisky and enjoy it; I don't drink it very much now. But I had a wonderful session with Charlie Maclean who’s injected a certain amount of knowledge in to me, so I have enough to go on as Thaddeus.

Gary Maitland
Albert

How did you come to be cast?
What happened was I've done a couple of films with Ken before – I was in Sweet Sixteen and Tickets. He must have remembered me so he gave us a wee call and asked us to come in for a chat. I went in and he told us the basics about the film – not too much, just a bit. He asked me if I wanted to do it and obviously I did, but I’ve actually got a job – I work for street cleansing for the council - so I had to take seven weeks’ unpaid leave.

Describe Albert
Albert brings a wee bit of comedy to the film. He just does crazy things. He’s one of the lads, likes drinking but he also comes out with some stuff in the film that you wouldn’t expect him to say. He’s there for the comedy but there’s some dialogue in it that’s a wee bit serious, you might say a bit more profound, too.

Does his background have any parallels with your own?
I live in Castlemilk and I work in Cambuslang area so I'm local. And I like getting a laugh from my own friends like he does – I like being a wee bit of a joker, know what I mean? And he likes Buckfast [fortified tonic wine] so I can relate to that – I used to drink Buckfast myself in the past! To be honest I didn't know a lot about whisky beforehand but I've definitely improved my knowledge. But I'm still more in to Buckfast.

How was the shoot?
It was great being with the group. Paul's [Brannigan] cool. I think he's done a cracking job, especially as it's the first time he's done stuff. We've all been staying on a local caravan site and had a bit of time together, playing darts and having a few drinks – just chilling. I like that you don't know what you're going to be doing when you come in each day because they don't show you the whole of the script.* Ken gives you lines – he tells you to just sneak that one in and the other actors they don't know what's going to happen so you get an instant reaction from them. To be honest I've never experienced anything else other than Ken's films. I know what Ken's like, I know how he works and I'm sure that's one reason why they've got me back. But I'm looking forward to getting back to my work because I enjoy it too.

What would you say The Angels' Share is about?
I would say it's about a young boy who's got a rough background. He's trying to make a better life for himself through whisky. Hopefully things will work out for him.

* Producer's note: the script is given out to the actors page by page in the days before filming. This is because we shoot in sequence.

Jasmin Riggins
Mo

How did you come to be cast?
I was cast through an agency and I went through five or six auditions before I got the part. It was improvising with six or seven different people doing different things in different situations, but I never had a clue who I was playing or what the story would be. Actually that was quite exciting because you're anxious to know about everything. The day I found out I was cast was the day that they told me and the rest of the cast something about who we were playing. It was the same day I was meant to be going to another audition so it only sunk in a few days later.

Describe your character
She's got attitude and she doesn't really care what people think, and she doesn't take any crap. It's really good fun to play!

Were you aware in the beginning that Mo and the gang were such important parts?
No! I didn't actually realise until a good way in to the shoot what the film is really heading towards because as you know we aren't shown future scripts so we don't have a clue. It's only in the last few weeks of the shoot that I thought, 'God, so this is what I'm going to be doing.' I didn't actually realise how close we were going to be, me and Gary and Will and Paul – and how important we were in the film. I didn't really think it was such an important part as what it has been so it's been great to realise that. It's brilliant that we're at the centre of the film. I love working with them – it's just like four boys. I'm not a tomboy but I can mix it with the boys if that makes sense. I've always had friends who were boys at school, older boys too, so I'm used to it.

Are there any parallels between you and Mo?
Well I've not got red hair for starters. But I suppose I have got a bit of attitude. Obviously I am playing her but there's some things that are similar - maybe I wouldnae take any crap off some people. I'd stand up for myself, put it that way. Plus I'm from Glasgow and we get to speak like we normally do for once. Although of course I don't want people to think that's the only way I can speak because I'm swearing every second word that comes out of my mouth. People will think I've got a foul mouth, but I don't swear like that. Well, not as much.

Have you acted before?
I used to do dancing - I've done dancing for years. Then I faded away from it but I did drama at school and so mum put me in to drama classes. That's when I thought I would quite like to do more of this. This is the biggest thing that I've done – I'm 18 - and it's been amazing, brilliant.

William Ruane
Rhino

Describe your character
He's just a wee bit of a jack the lad. A sarcastic type – likes a joke, likes a laugh, just gets on with everybody and he's game for anything. One thing though: I still haven't worked out why he's called Rhino. Maybe because he's thick skinned. Or always horny. Anyway, his story is he's up in court for riding and humping and putting cones on statues. And he gives some cop grief, aye, which was fun.

How did you come to be cast?
This is the fourth time I've worked with Ken – I was in Sweet Sixteen, Tickets, and I had a role in The Wind That Shakes The Barley. I just got a call to meet up for a coffee and a chat. He told us about the project. They called me back for another coffee and told me that they wanted me to play a role. But they didn't know which one yet. Then obviously the part of Rhino came up and it was great to be back. They asked me to come along and help with the casting as well. We were constantly casting, doing scenes among ourselves and getting that vibe between one another.

Are there any parallels between you and Rhino?
As far as community service and going to jail goes? Nah, I'm a good boy when it comes to that. I love a laugh as well and I'm up for anything. But I'm not a Buckfast fan – it's a horrible wine that the young 'uns drink. So on drink I'm the opposite of Rhino. Mind you I'm not much of a whisky man either. I just don't like the taste. I've never been in a distillery before but now I've had the full tour and I know a lot about how whisky is made. So you learn a lot. I made sure I had a wee sip at the wrap party.

How was the shoot?
The shoot was great. When you've worked with Ken before you know what to expect – which is not a lot! You don't get told much. We only know what's happening right in front of us because that's the way Ken goes. But it was good to be back and do the full duration of the shoot again. The last time I got a full six weeks was on Sweet Sixteen. Of course, there were a few surprises along the way. There was a scene when we were hitchhiking in the back of a trailer, and there were a couple of furry animals in the back – and Ken hadn't told us until the last moment. It was sheep at first, then it was a couple of shaggy dogs eventually. They got a bit rowdy – me and Gary [Maitland] were sitting in the back of this trailer, bobbing along and they got a bit playful: one was growling, trying to bite our feet off. Just goes to show: you can't choose your co-stars.

Siobhan Reilly
Leonie

Describe Leonie?
She's a really interesting character. She's a girl who is from a very hardworking family and was brought up with good manners and good ethics in life. But her father was obviously not brought up in the same way she was. He's had a harder childhood living in not such a well off area. He brought her up to try and do better for herself in life. Then she got involved with a boy, Robbie, who's from a similar background to her father – and obviously this hasn't gone down very well with the family.

But she's the sort of person who judges someone for who they are. She's not looking at their situation. In Robbie she saw a good person who's not had a good chance in his life. At the beginning of the film they have a child. For them it becomes such a bonding thing. It becomes their chance to grow together with their child and show people that they are a loving family, show that they can do it their way and they don't need other people around them to make that work. It's just a question of whether or not circumstances will let them.

How did you come to be cast?
I was working as a supply teacher although I have been an actor before. My boyfriend had noticed a posting on a website saying that Ken was looking for someone so I got in contact and went in. You could tell that he was really interested in getting to know you as a person first of all and it was all quite playful so you felt really comfortable and at ease. You could see he just wanted to draw out different aspects of your personality. I met them several times with different actors just trying to find that chemistry. I met Paul [Brannigan] a few times and tried different things out just to see whether we gelled together. It meant we had a good relationship for when the filming started.

Did you have any inkling of the character you'd be playing?
I had no idea what I was going for, not a clue. Even halfway through the casting process I still had no idea what the role would be. I don't think Ken really knows when he first meets you what your role will be either. He was trying to suss out where I might fit in. It means when you get cast it's a bit of a leap of faith because you don't know what your journey's going to be after that. You just have to trust and hope that all goes well.

Is Leonie's social situation one that's familiar to you?
Very familiar. I'm from Petersburn in Airdrie, which is a little town on the outskirts of Glasgow. I trained as an actor when I was younger and I also trained as a teacher.
All of the filming was done in places I live near or know. I come from a very working class family and in my teaching work I deal with a lot of young parents and single parents and a lot of poverty as well. I like the fact that this film shows how people are people no matter where they come from, in spite of things not being the greatest for them. Where I live, there's not a lot of money or opportunities for people but they're good hearted people who would do anything for you. You see that in the film.

Can you have a comedy when such serious issues are at stake?
The film shows how for all people do have hardships in life people have also got a sense of humour and a sense of fun about them. And that gets them through situations as well. Friendships and relationships make you who you are, for all you may have troubles.

How did your and Paul's relationship evolve?
When we met we just got on. You know how sometimes you meet somebody and you just click? I think we understand each other – Paul and I have got very similar backgrounds, so we both understood where these characters were coming from.

Paul was quite a young parent as well – he's got a little child; he understands the social implications of that. And I know a lot of people in Paul's situation. It just seemed to gel really well from the start.

What surprised you once filming began?
Up until filming I knew my back story but I didn't really know what was going to happen next. On the very first day we went to meet the costume people and the head costumer said, 'I need to ask you questions about your sizes. But I can only ask you what shoe size are you.' I had a sneaky suspicion there might be a baby involved but I didn't know that at the time. It turns out they didn't ask me for clothing sizes because I was going to be in maternity wear! I hadn't known I was going to be pregnant in the film! When I found out I said I had two sisters who'd had babies recently, so I could bring in lots of maternity wear. They asked if I could bring in a baby! So then my nephew got involved and he is the baby you see in the film.

Charlie Maclean
Rory McAllister

Describe you character
Essentially I just play me – a whisky expert called Rory McAllister. He hosts a tasting in Edinburgh and is asked to provide the provenance of the 'holy grail' whisky. This is my acting debut. Well, the last time I acted on stage was at school in Marlowe's Faustus. I was very flattered to be asked. But thank God Ken doesn't operate with scripts – I couldn't have done it with a script. Whereas ad libbing wasn't too much of a problem.

You are a Master of the Quaich. What is that?
There's a whisky industry organisation called The Keepers of the Quaich, which was invented in the late eighties to honour those who had done good service to Scotland and the Scotch whisky industry. I became a Keeper in 1992. They have a further rank called Master and there are only 50 of them. I became one in October 2009.

What does the job involve?
Nothing at all. Except occasional dinners at Blair Castle, which is the society's HQ.

Where does your expertise in whisky come from?
Practice. I started writing about whisky in 1981 for various whisky companies. I did formal training in sensory evaluation with the Scotch Whisky Research Institute in 1992, I published my first book that year and it was really after that that my career swerved off towards whisky.

How did you become involved in The Angels' Share?
I got a call out of the blue in January last year (2010) saying we're making a film that might feature whisky quite strongly. The scriptwriter will be in Scotland next week and he'd like to speak to you. Paul Laverty phoned up and I said come along whenever – but make it after six o clock. Then we can have a few drams and I can bore for Scotland on the subject.

Quite frankly I get contacted by production companies about once a year and nothing ever comes of it, so I didn't take it that seriously. Paul Laverty is an extremely modest chap so it was only about 40 minutes in to the conversation that he mentioned that the director was to be Ken Loach. I immediately stood up and paid attention.

Over the course of last year we spoke about locations and contacts and then the script arrived in February 2011 and I was one of the very few people to see the whole of it. Again, I gave them my ha'penny-worth in relation to whisky.

I'm a consultant at Bonhams, the auctioneers and they were doing an auction of a single bottle of whisky in late February. It was a 70-year-old Glenlivet that was to be auctioned for the Japanese Tsunami fund. They asked me to say a few words to set up the provenance of this bottle before it was auctioned off. I phoned Rebecca [O'Brien, Producer] and said single lot auctions are not that common: if it would be of any use for you and Ken to see this you should come.

It happened that Ken was in Glasgow at the time so they came. The following day Rebecca phoned up and said 'Would you like the role of Rory?' I said, 'I'm not an actor.' She said, 'Well that's the point. You just have to play yourself.' And so that's how I got landed in this part.

What was tweaked in the script at your suggestion?
The main tweak was the 'Holy Grail' whisky itself. It was originally envisaged to be a Port Ellen. That's a closed distillery on Islay and is highly collectable but it is released every year. They wanted to make a really big price for the auction in the film so I suggested Malt Mill. Malt Mill was a distillery that was built within the Lagavulin distillery on Islay in 1908 and operated until 1962. There is no known Malt Mill around. There are three claimant bottles but it's generally reckoned that two of them are fakes so it's extremely rare. Whisky collectors around the world - of which there are many nowadays - would give their eye teeth for a bottle of Malt Mill, let alone a small cask of Malt Mill, which is what's on offer in the film.

Otherwise I didn't change anything significant – really just the language. Paul would refer to the 'dunnage' – when it should be a 'dunnage warehouse'. Just little things like that. Only whisky experts would know the difference.

Do auctions like the one in the film actually happen?
Collecting whisky is becoming more and more popular. The biggest collections are in Italy but there are collections all over the world. Some people specialise in individual distilleries, lowland malts, pre-1920s malts. There's also a thriving market in forgeries now because of this interest. So an auction just as this one would attract considerable interest.

How did you go about educating the cast?
We did two days with John [Henshaw] and Roger [Allam]. They didn't need much educating really. They took to it like ducks to water. I was hugely impressed with their noses. I taught them what they would be expected to know to help them get in to character. These fellows would probably know a bit of the history, they would know how to handle a whisky glass and how to nose and taste. They would also know about prices and the industry today. With John we went straight to Glenkinchie distillery just outside Edinburgh so he could see what a distillery looks like. Then we went back in to town and had some lunch in a restaurant that has an excellent collection of old whiskies. Then we went to my place outside Edinburgh and had a substantial nosing and tasting. With Roger I think we went straight in to the nosing and tasting.

Could a boy from the tenements in Glasgow like Robbie genuinely have a naturally brilliant palate?
The truth of the matter is that we're all similarly equipped. There is a phenomenon called specific anosmia that is like odour blindness where you cannot detect certain groups of smells but by and large we all have the same tools. With a bit of practice and concentration we can all do it. The work is mainly done with the nose, as compared to our mouths our noses are infinitely more sensitive. To identify a smell and then to name it just takes practice. Robbie's interest first of all develops with Harry. Then he starts reading books. That's how it would work – interest followed by practice, nosing, tasting, discussing, taking notes and working at it. It's perfectly credible.

What's your favourite whisky?
The one that you're about to buy me! To be honest most of my work is done with malt whisky so at six o' clock in the evening when I reach for a dram it would be a blend that I'm looking for. And probably my favourite blended scotch is Johnnie Walker Black Label. Simple as that.